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ABSTRACT

The lack of women in top administrative positions in education has often been dismissed as attributable to role conflict. The available research literature is examined to determine if there is evidence of role conflict, and, if present, if role conflict prevents women from functioning adequately as educational administrators. Three possible types of role conflict that may result when individual needs clash with normative standards and/or institutional expectations are personality conflict, role-personality conflict, and role-role conflict. Personality conflict is defined as occurring when aspects of an individual's personality are in conflict with other aspects of that same individual's personality. Role-personality conflict is the belief that women simply do not possess the personality traits necessary to perform the role expected of any administrator including that of any educational administrator. Role-role conflict for women is based on the assumption that women simply cannot handle two or more roles simultaneously. Styles of coping with role conflict are identified as role redefinition, personal reorientation to roles, and reactive role behavior. Role conflicts for women administrators do indeed exist; however, we can hardly conclude that this renders women less efficient or effective if they choose to make educational administration their major role in life. (Author/MLF)

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WOMEN IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION: IS THERE A BASIC ROLE CONFLICT?

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WOMEN IN EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION: IS THERE A BASIC ROLE CONFLICT?

There has always been a dichotomy when it comes to attitudes toward the Working Man versus the Career Woman. You are probably all familiar with at least some of the following comparisons which first appeared in the newsletter "The Executive Woman". To refresh your memory, it goes like this:

A businessman is agressive; a businesswoman is pushy.
He is careful about details; she's picky.
He loses his temper because he's so involved in his job; she is bitchy.
He follows through; she doesn't know when to quit.
He's firm; she's stubborn.
He makes wise judgments; she reveals her prejudices.
He is a man of the world; she's been around.
He isn't afraid to say what he thinks; she's opinionated.
He exercises authority; she's tyrannical.
He's discreet; she's secretive.
He's a stern taskmaster; she's difficult to work for.

We could all add our own items to the list. But the point is that a dichotomy exists in people's attitudes toward men and women and the attributes which they attribute to each and very definitely there is a difference in what we consider to be the desirable characteristics for each sex.

This dichotomy has carried over into the educational system of our society. I can remember how, as a young girl growing up, my mother always impressed upon me not only the importance of getting an education but the fact that school teaching was an ideal "woman's occupation". She would list all the traditional advantages of this profession. The pay was good. You had the same hours and holidays as your children. You had all summer off. All of which, of course, have been attractive features of the teaching profession for decades now.

The interesting thing to me, in retrospect, was that my mother never once suggested that I should aspire to becoming a school principal, that is an educational administrator. My mother used to say that the best boss she

ever had was a woman administrator named Sarah Stokes who had distinguished herself enough to become the principal of a large public elementary school in the city schools of Chicago, Illinois, at a time when even regular teaching jobs were still difficult to find.

I had been a good high school student, and even won a scholarship to the state teacher's college in my home state. But the thought never entered my mind that I should aspire to becoming an educational administrator any more than it had my mother's.

Why is this dichotomy found in the education profession? Why for decades have women been counseled and pushed into the teaching profession only to be systematically barred from the doors of the offices of the principal, the superintendent, the department chairman, the dean, and the president? In higher education, where women's presence in the teaching ranks has not been as welcome as in the lower levels, women have never attained the top positions in anywhere near their proportional numbers.

It is obvious if we look at the pecking order in education that it has merely reflected our society as a whole. Those who teach the youngest children--in nursery schools and kindergartens--have never enjoyed the status and perquisites of those who teach at the postsecondary level, in our colleges and universities. And, as in the larger society, leadership positions in education have been reserved, for the most part, to men. Indeed, women have in certain areas been a decreasing percentage in educational administration. In a 1975 study by Suzanne Howard she made the following observations:

> In a profession where 63% of all public school instructional personnel is female,. . .figures suggest that a general pattern of sex role sterotyping exists in educational employment. In a field where women hold 20% of the master's degrees and 8.5% of the doctorates in educational administration. . ., the national percentages of women in educational administration continue the pattern of steady decline which began more than fifteen years ago (Howard, 1975).

Certain other facts were given by Howard for the year 1975. In that year, less than one-half of a percent of the nation's 17,000 school districts had women superintendents. Only two percent of our secondary school principals were women while only eighteen percent of the nation's elementary school principals were women.

Peggy Elder reporting on a 1971 survey of state universities and land-grant colleges wrote that the median number of women in top-level administrative posts was zero. By 1975 this had changed slightly but she pointed out that women holding such jobs were located primarily in the lower administrative ranks--assistant or associate deans or directors of small administrative units. A Carnegie Council survey of affirmative action policies in institutions of higher education drew the same conclusions. Emphasizing the scarcity of female faculty members at this level, this report stated that women have been even more rarely represented in top academic administrative positions, which is not suprising since they are excluded from even being considered (Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education, 1975). This same report found the preponderance of women administrators concentrated in the two female-associated areas of librarian and personnel or placement director.

This lack of women in top administrative positions in education has often been glibly dismissed as attributable to role conflict. With this concept firmly in mind, I began a survey of the available research literature with the intention of either verifying or disproving this assumption, at least for my own satisfaction, once and for all. As a starting point I used the Getzels-Guba Social Systems Model which postulates that social behavior in an institution is affected by institutional expectations, group intentions, and individual needs. This model considers the most important subunit of the institution to be the role. Roles represent positions, offices or statuses

Types of ROLE CONFLICT Faced by Women Administrators...

- Personality Conflict
- Role-Personality Conflict
- Role-Role Conflict

within the institution and form the hierarchy of authority. Roles are defined in terms of expectations or normative rights.

The Getzels-Guba Model helps explain certain role conflicts which may result when individual needs clash with normative standards and/or institutional expectations.

Three possible types of role conflict which may result are personality conflict, role-personality conflict, and role-role conflict.

The first of these--personality conflict--can best be described as occurring when aspects of an individual's personality are in conflict with other aspects of that same individual's personality. Some of the best examples of such role conflicts are associated with sex roles. Girls who want to be popular with boys but who also happen to have a high need for scholastic or other types of achievement most certainly face personality conflict in varying degrees. On the one hand, they are trying to be "feminine", passive, and attractive to the opposite sex, while on the other hand they may display such "masculine" traits as assertiveness, initiative, and a high degree of ambition or career aspiration. In a classic study on women and their "fear of success" Matina Horner postulated that a personality conflict women face is fearing to be successful because they are afraid they will lose their "femininity" if they do (Horner, 1972). The interesting thing is that men, on the other hand, help define their masculinity through their work and successful job performance (Gordon and Strober, 1975).

The "fear of success" myth was disproved to my satisfaction by a research study on law students which concluded that women are <u>not</u> more likely to fear success than men, although they are more likely to fear rejection by the opposite sex (Burtis, Zanna, and Campbell, 1975).

There are a number of studies which prove that women can successfully integrate their femininity with high achievement. Hennig's study of women in

top-level management positions in the business world (Hennig and Jardim, 1977) and numerous studies of successful women in educational administration bear this out (Freeman, 1977; Phiffner, 1975; and Schumch, 1975). Hennig found that where there was strong support by a father of both the "feminine" and the need for achievement traits in a daughter, enough ego strength had been developed by the time the young woman was told by society that achievement was unacceptable that she could ignore the message.

The second type of role conflict, role-personality conflict, is, of course, closely related to personality conflict and the categories are not necessarily mutually exclusive. It is commonly believed that women simply do not possess the personality traits necessary to perform the role expected of any administrator, including that of any educational administrator. This area of role conflict has a number of facets.

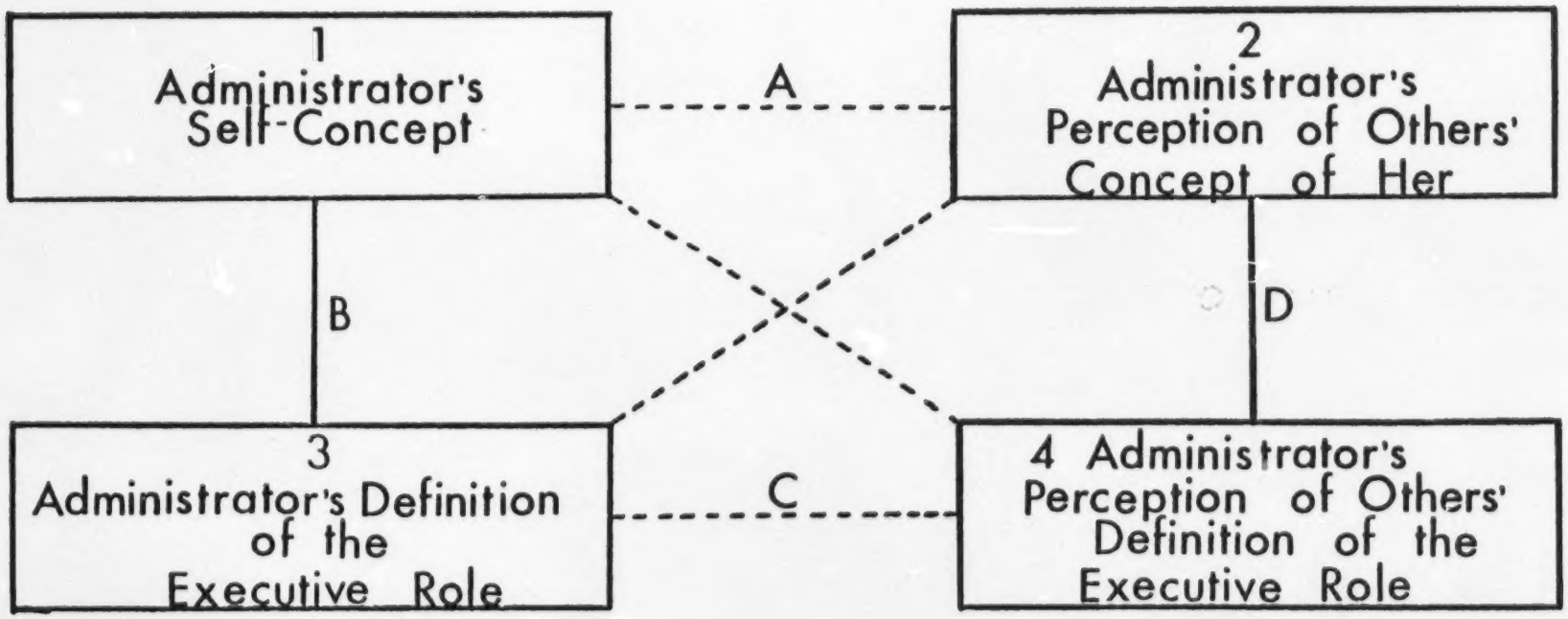
In the first place, the search for a single set of traits necessary for success as an administrator has long ago been abandoned. "Attempts to develop and implement a profile for male business executives have not been successful" (Nieboer, 1975: 102). Indeed, that classic management theorist Peter Drucker has said there is no one effective personality for management.

The Contingency Theory of Management, which has isolated two types of behavior called initiating structure and consideration, has replaced the old trait theory approach. The Contingency Model states that leadership effectiveness depends as much on the group situation as it does on the leader. Fred Fiedler had this to say:

> One style of leadership is not in itself better than the other, nor is one type of leadership behavior appropriate for all conditions. Hence, almost everyone should be able to succeed as a leader in some situations and almost everyone is likely to fail in others (Fiedler, 1967: 247).

Let us examine the concept of role-personality conflict further by studying a chart adapted from The Managerial Woman by Hennig and Jardim. All of these

Relationship of the Administrative Role to Self-Concept



Adapted from: Hennig, Margaret, and Jardim, Anne. The Managerial Woman. Garden City: Anchor Press, 1977, p. 92.

concepts are important and interrelated although relationships A, B, C, and D are particularly so. It is in relationship D, in the fit between others' concept of a particular woman and their concept of the administrator role, that a woman confronts the most difficulty. This is because the administrator role is seen by many people, both men and women, as an exclusively male role. It matters not how qualified or competent a particular woman is, she does not fit the role because she is first and foremost a woman.

Hennig and Jardim point out that a man in an organization never has to face the fact that he is not the right person for a job simply because he is a man. Women, on the other hand, suffer irreparable damage to their self-confidence when they confront the fact that they are "not the right person for the job" because they are a woman irregardless of their other personal qualifications or extremely high competence.

Negative fits in any of these relationships cause a great deal of role conflict for a woman administrator. In relationship A for example, a negative fit could cause concern, worry, anxiety and other trauma as a woman struggles with the fact that her self-concept and others' concept of her do not jibe. This again, will seriously undermine her confidence and make her question her own belief in herself and her abilities.

There are two points in a woman's career where it is crucial to have as many positive "fits" in these four major relationships as possible if a woman is to make it to the top. These are the point at which a woman enters work and the point at which she reaches her highest career level. Without this relationship synchronization it is doubtful that any woman will even aspire to an administrative position. The recent influx of men into public education at the secondary level and below, plus the predominance of men in post-secondary education has had the result of carrying the successful business manager image (with, unfortunately, its accompanying set of masculine traits)

over into education as the new image of the successful educational leader. Education, however, is not business nor industry and only permitting this one management style to exist is unnecessarily restrictive for both sexes. Since a model which favors so called masculine traits as the ideal so obviously favors male dominance, and those in power seldom relinquish their prerogatives easily, it is not hard to see why men have not been eager to change this model.

Women, supposedly, are not high in achievement needs but are high in affiliation needs. This supplies the rationale for their generally playing out their destinies in ascribed sex roles as mothers, wives, "helping" career women, and in low achievement jobs. But the data do not support this lower achievement need for many women, at least in education. Aspiration levels may often be less than men's but women do nonetheless aspire to careers in educational administration, as shown in studies by Dias, Way, and McMillin, and they have as high an achievement need at least as other male school teachers. Indeed, for women aspiring to administration, need achievement has been found to be higher than for men.

There is a great deal of evidence that leadership roles in education are themselves changing. Dee sees a shift in the form of the managerial mystique away from the predominately male orientation toward one more compatible with women's unique skills and knowledge. There has been a controversy over whether the school principal's or the college president's role should be that of instructional leader of the institution (Mazzarella, 1977; and Cohen and Roueche, 1969), but the recent demand for accountability would seem to have settled this issue in the affirmative.

There is a reemphasis on learning and teaching at all levels of education and the trend toward competency-based instruction is seen by Silver (1976) as an impetus toward more women in leadership roles. Whether this occurs remains to be seen, but one fact which shows up in our research studies over

and over again is that women administrators have most generally entered through the teaching ranks and have more teaching experience than men (Gross and Trask, 1976; Pfiffner, 1975; Johnson and O'Brien), often by more than a decade. Their greater experience in the classroom would definitely seem to favor their bringing an expertise in instructional matters to the role of school administrator.

The proof of the pudding, of course, is to see how women actually have performed in the role of educational leader. Leadership studies over and over again confirm the success of women in playing this role. The Florida Leadership Studies, and those of Hemphill, Griffiths, Frederiksen, and Morinsk (cited in McCarthy and Webb, 1977; Van Meir, 1975; Howard, 1975; Fishel and Pottker, 1975) as well as the Gross and Trask (1976) study confirm that women can perform as well as, or better than, male administrators.

Gordon and Strober (1975) see aggression as the only sex-linked and possibly significant different characteristic which men possess to a greater extent than women. But with the emphasis on team management, the value of this trait to educational leadership is questionable. A "fifth stage" of academic leadership is predicted with emphasis on cooperation and conflict resolution and "leadership defined as searches for team effort and achievements rather than individualized struggles for survival" (Palmieri and Shakeshaft, 1976: 60).

> The fifth stage of educational leadership positions will be ideally suited to women, and indeed they must prepare to offer all of their resources and energies to fill the moral vacuum in leadership which is so currently pervasive (Palmieri and Shakeshaft, 1976: 60-61).

Today increased role pressure on school principals (Vetter, 1976), departmental chairmen (Carroll, 1976), and especially on college presidents, indicate there is a need for people who can perform in a proactive, rather than merely a reactive mode. Women administrators, who have often had to learn to juggle many roles and conflicting expectations, should certainly do as well in these redefined and increasingly demanding roles as men.

This brings us to the last, but not least important, type of role conflict which is role-role conflict. The presumed role-role conflict for women is based on the assumption that women simply cannot handle two or more roles simultaneously. This does not appear to be a problem for women administrators for a number of reasons. For example, many women, especially in higher education, are not married by virtue of having always been single or because they are presently widowed or divorced (Schmuch, 1975; Gross and Trask, 1976; Thurston, 1975; Johnson and O'Brien, 1976). When women administrators are married they apparently do not consider it an impediment, but often an advantage to their career (Pfiffner, 1975 and 1976; Freeman, 1977). The group of married administrators reported on by Pfiffner and Freeman may have had an unusual ability to intergrate role-role conflict but what the data really show are that career women are pursuing diverse lifestyles--whether single or married--and that an assumption that all women will automatically face uncompromising role-role conflict in pursuing an educational administration career is simply not true. The well-documented fact that women enter administration at a later age (generally not before age forty) also is significant because wife-role duties will probably have decreased or become more manageable with increased experience at dealing with these tasks.

The later age at which women achieve administrative positions is also significant in regard to their role as mothers. Of course, many stayed single or chose the option not to have children (Thurston, 1975; Freeman, 1977). But breaks in service to bear and raise children for those who did become mothers were generally taken while the women were still teachers and thus did not interrupt their administrative careers (Schmuch, 1975). For most, their children were either grown (Thurston, 1975) or old enough that they did not require intensive care or attention by the time they became administrators (Pfiffner, 1975). Again, women administrators studied often cited children as an advantage to their career.

There is a reported higher divorce rate among women Ph.D.'s than among men Ph.D.'s--25% as opposed to 10% for the latter group (Clark, 1977). Also, women doctoral students reportedly have the unusually high divorce rate of 40%. This certainly indicates that there is a potential role conflict problem for many women administrators for the doctoral degree is a prerequisite for many higher education positions and apparently increases a woman's chances of obtaining a superintendency (Freeman, 1977; Thurston, 1975; Paddock, 1978). On the other hand, this is somewhat balanced out by the fact that having a doctorate increases a woman's chances for remarriage.

One factor which has not received enough attention but which becomes apparent in studying working women is that their work and study patterns are simply different than men's but, nonetheless, often just as planned and purposeful.

> Women by necessity must often follow a discontinuous plan of full-time study, characterized by short breaks between or slow pursuit of the baccalaureate degree, the master's degree, and lastly the doctorate degree....higher education and the professions at all levels have traditionally ascribed a negative value perspective to the failure of students and workers to follow an academic or employment pattern consecutive in time and specialized in content.... few, if any, educational or professional work programs in American colleges have allowed for the acceptance of discontinuous study and employment during the most intellectually productive years of a woman's life...(Alfred and Good, 1972).

Role overload is the term sometimes (Gorman and Vetter, 1975) used to describe the role-role conflict. A woman supposedly must live two full lives simultaneously to be both a professional (i.e., an administrator) and a woman and she must actually play four roles at once: occupational, spousal, maternal, and household-managerial. But if we substitute paternal for the third of these, we can just as easily apply these same four roles to any married career man.

One researcher reported greater life satisfaction and more effective performance among working wives but not among their husbands (Burke, 1976).

This probably suggests that husbands of working wives have their own role conflicts to resolve. This is emphasized by Clark (1976) who states that husbands, too, must integrate their roles. They need to have high self-esteem and independent and successful careers. This was the pattern reported on by Pfiffner (1975) among husbands of successful women administrators in California community colleges. A word at this point needs to be said to emphasize the importance of attitudes. Howard has said:

> What is clear is that no matter how excellent the qualifications and job performance, a woman's opportunities for career advancement are influenced by the attitudes of society toward her role as a woman (Howard, 1975: 26).

This society includes the school boards, trustees, superintendents and other administrators who will be hiring women administrators in education. If they see a negative fit, going back to our chart on perceptions of the administrative role, between the role of an administrator and the role of a woman, any woman, they simply will not give any woman a chance to perform that administrator role.

In conclusion, we can say that there are real role conflicts for ambitious women, just as there are for ambitious men. And society will still not tolerate a great deal of deviance in women. ". . . [W]omen are permited a much narrower range of social roles to play and thus a much narrower range within which they can express their normal personalities, needs, motivations, and personal styles" (Goode, 1973: 105-06). Maverick probably best describes many, if not most, of the women who have made it to the top in administration and it is certain that a great deal of ego strength is necessary to go against what one's culture dictates to you is not your sexually ascribed role or status.

How have women coped with all this role conflict? By looking at this chart we can see that three styles of coping with role conflict have been

identified. These are role redefinition, personal reorientation to roles, and reactive role behavior. Francine and Douglas Hall (Hall and Hall, 1978) in an excellent article on dual career couples report that people who use role redefinition experience the highest levels of satisfaction and happiness among groups they have studied. This involves negotiating with role senders to change one's role expectations and make them more compatible with other responsibilities and interests. It is, in essence, a restructuring of ones' life roles. One might, for example, agree with role senders that one will not engage in certain activities (e.g. volunteer work). One may enlist assistance in role activities from other family members or outsiders, such as grandparents, cleaning women or babysitters. Some married couples integrate their careers by working with the spouse or in related fields in a method of coping called "linking up."

Personal reorientation as a style of coping can also be quite effective. It involves changing one's own attitudes about various roles and doing only those activities which are personally seen as most important. This includes establishing priorities, maintaining strict separation of roles, and simply ignoring less important roles. This style of coping, of course, places the burden of change on oneself rather than on the family or work environment.

The third and final response to role demands, reactive role behavior, means accepting <u>all</u> role demands as given and trying to find ways to meet them. This could include planning, scheduling, organizing, or working twice as hard. For obvious reasons, those who use this style report the lowest levels of satisfaction and happiness.

Successful women administrators have probably utilized these first and second styles of coping and have accomplished what one author calls role-making rather than role-taking. The possibilities are assessed and then the individual creates and fashions her own life role, including in it only those

3
Styles
of
Coping with Role Conflict

1. ROLE REDEFINITION

2. PERSONAL REORIENTATION
TO ROLES

3. REACTIVE ROLE BEHAVIOR

component roles she really chooses to play and simply ignoring or rejecting the rest. Finally, although we concede that role conflicts for women administrators do indeed exist, we can hardly conclude that this renders women less efficient or effective if they choose to make educational administration their major role in life. Schmuch concluded in her research study that all the women administrators she interviewed had clear and congruent self-images and displayed "a well-developed ability to integrate their societally ascribed roles with their professional roles as female administrators" (Schmuch, 1975: 81). In fact, those who do work out these role conflicts are most likely to be the true "cream of the crop" and to provide the outstanding leadership so sorely needed in the field of educational administration today.

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